

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 PM-04 H-01 INR-07 L-03
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FM AMEMBASSY ANKARA
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 8173
INFO AMEMBASSY ATHENS
AMEMBASSY LONDON
AMEMBASSY NICOSIA
USMISSION NATO
AMCONSUL ADANA
AMCONSUL ISTANBUL
AMCONSUL IZMIR
USDOCOSOUTH NAPLES
EUCOM
DIA WASHDC

C O N F I D E N T I A L ANKARA 5331

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: MPOL, TU

SUBJECT: GENERAL ADNAM ERSOZ NAMED ACTING ARMY COMMANDER

REF: (A) ANKARA 4241 (DTG 021415Z JUL 77), (B) ANKARA 4685
(DTG 210700Z JUN 77)

1. SUMMARY: FIRST ARMY COMMANDER GENERAL ERSOZ HAS BEEN NAMED ACTING ARMY COMMANDER TO REPLACE GENERAL ERSUN WHO RETIRED UNEXPECTEDLY JUNE 1. BACKGROUND OF ERSUN RETIREMENT AND ERSOZ REASSIGNMENT, WHICH PUTS HIM IN GOOD POSITION TO SUCCEED TURKISH GENERAL STAFF CHIEF SANCAR, STILL NOT KNOWN. END SUMMARY.

2. TURKISH PRESS JULY 14 AND 15 REPORTS THAT FIRST ARMY
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COMMANDER GENERAL ADNAN ERSOZ HAS BEEN NAMED ACTING ARMY COMMANDER TO REPLACE GENERAL NAMIK KEMAL ERSUN WHO UNEXPECTEDLY RETIRED JUNE 1 (REFTELS). DESIGNATION OF ERSOZ AS ACTING ARMY COMMANDER ENDS THE ABNORMAL SITUATION UNDER WHICH TURKISH GENERAL STAFF CHIEF SANCAR HAD ASSUMED TEMPORARY RESPONSIBILITY FOR COMMAND OF THE ARMY. THIS UNUSUAL PROCEDURE HAD CAUSED SPECULATION AND HAD BECOME A MINOR DOMESTIC POLITICAL ISSUE.

3. EARLIER THIS WEEK, HURRIYET REPORTED THAT DURING THE NEGOTIATIONS BETWEEN THE THREE CONSERVATIVE PARTY LEADERS NOW ATTEMPTING TO FORM A COALITION GOVERNMENT, AGREEMENT HAD BEEN REACHED TO NAME THIRD ARMY COMMANDER ALI FETHI ESENER GROUND FORCES COMMANDER. THE NEXT DAY THE PRESS REPORTED THE ASSIGNMENT OF ERSOZ. PRIME MINISTER ECEVIT IN TALKING TO REPORTERS JULY 14 COMMENTED APPROVINGLY ON THE ERSOZ ASSIGNMENT AND CRITICIZED THE REPORTED EFFORTS OF THE CONSERVATIVE PARTY LEADERS TO INVOLVE THEMSELVES IN THE QUESTION OF MILITARY SUCCESSION. A FEW HOURS LATER, BOTH JUSTICE PARTY (JP) CHAIRMAN DEMIREL AND NATIONALIST ACTION PARTY (NAP) CHAIRMAN TURKES HELD SEPARATE PRESS CONFERENCES AT WHICH THEY DENIED EVER HAVING DISCUSSED THE ASSIGNMENT OF ESENER TO REPLACE ERSUN AND CHALLENGED ECEVIT TO PROVE ALLEGATIONS THAT THEY HAVE ACTED IMPROPERLY.

4. GENERAL ERSOZ WILL REPORTEDLY ARRIVE IN ANKARA JULY 15 TO BECOME ACTING ARMY COMMANDER. THIS ASSIGNMENT PUTS HIM IN LINE TO BE NAMED ARMY COMMANDER AND THUS BECOME THE MOST LIKELY CANDIDATE TO REPLACE TURKISH GENERAL STAFF CHIEF SANCAR. SANCAR RETIRES IN MARCH 1978, AS HE IS PRESENTLY SCHEDULED TO DO. THIS PATTERN OF SUCCESSION IS WHAT MOST OBSERVERS EXPECTED AFTER ERSUN'S EARLY RETIREMENT SIX WEEKS AGO. ERSOZ IS POPULAR IN THE ARMY AND IS CONSIDERED TO BE PERHAPS THE BEST, MOST EFFECTIVE ARMY COMMANDER ON ACTIVE DUTY. HE IS NOT IDENTIFIED WITH ANY PARTICULAR POLITICAL PARTY,
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ALTHOUGH HE IS RUMORED TO BE SYMPATHETIC TO THE REPUBLICAN PEOPLE'S PARTY (RPP).

5. WE CANNOT EXPLAIN THE REASON FOR THE SIX WEEKS' DELAY BETWEEN ERSUN'S RETIREMENT AND ERSOZ'S DESIGNATION AS ACTING ARMY COMMANDER. WE CONTINUE TO BELIEVE ERSUN'S RETIREMENT WAS PROBABLY DUE TO INTERNAL ARMY POLITICS. THE HANDLING OF THE ERSOZ ASSIGNMENT, HOWEVER, SUGGESTS AT THE VERY LEAST A SENSITIVITY TO THE DOMESTIC POLITICAL SITUATION. POSSIBLE REASONS FOR THE DELAY IN THE ASSIGNMENT INCLUDE: A DESIRE BY SANCAR TO DELAY THE DECISION UNTIL A FULLY EMPOWERED GOVERNMENT TAKES OFFICE AND DEMIREL'S IMPUTED PREFERENCE FOR ESENER. THE DECISION TO PROCEED WITH THE ASSIGNMENT AT THIS TIME COULD HAVE BEEN PROMPTED BY, AMONG OTHER THINGS, THE HURRIYET STORY, POLITICAL PRESSURE FROM ECEVIT, OR SANCAR'S DESIRE TO BALANCE HIS JULY 13 PUBLIC STATEMENT (ANKARA 5254) WHICH WAS INTERPRETED AS SUPPORTIVE OF DEMIREL'S EFFORTS TO FORM A GOVERNMENT.
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